

**"Dance Dance Revolution" - Dance as More Than Spectacle**

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**By**

*Esther Sarah Bower*

**Thesis Advisor(s)**

*Christie Zimmerman & Rebecca Pappas*

**Ball State University**

**Muncie, Indiana**

*November 2018*

**Expected Date of Graduation**

*May 2019*

## **Abstract**

When it comes to the performing arts, most people view them as “just for fun” or something entertaining. In an interview from Dance Magazine, Garnet Henderson said people always say her job is enjoyable. A common response would be “Oh, that’s fun. I wish I could do something fun like that.” While there are aspects of the arts that fall into that category, the arts are so much more than just fun. In fact, through my coursework at Ball State, I have come to challenge that statement. In my Journalism/Telecommunications (TCOM) classes, I am learning to dig deep and look past surface level answers; in my dance classes, I have come to understand the medium of dance in a much deeper and meaningful way.

This creative thesis combines dance, journalism, and telecommunications in a podcast series that challenges the idea that dance is simply spectacle and entertaining. In my two podcast episodes (titled “Dance Dance Revolution”), Rebecca Pappas and I interview experts in the field and dive into the work they are doing to advance dance in society. We also look at how dance experts are using dance to change and bring awareness to societal shortcomings (such as classism, racism, power struggles, etc... to name a few). My role in the podcast included pre-recording research, organization of the interviews/sources, editing content, and question development. In this rationale, I will give an outline of my background with the topic, what went into the podcasts, and the decisions made to construct this two-episode series.

### **Background**

My introduction to the topic of dance started at the ripe age of four. My mom enrolled me in dance classes, and I haven’t looked back. From a tiny ballerina to a college student pursuing a major in Dance Studies, I have always been passionate about the art form. But, throughout the last four years of my undergraduate degree, I’ve seen my understanding and passion about the art form grow and develop in ways I never would’ve imagined as a young and wide-eyed four-year-old. Growing up, dance brought me joy. It was a way for me to personally escape, as well as a way for my

audience to escape. Plain and simple, it was fun. But, that was really all it was to me. It was an outlet of enjoyment and something I found entertaining as a performer and spectator.

It wasn't until coming to Ball State University and diving into my majors: Dance, Journalism (NEWS)/Telecommunications that I've come to understand that dance is more than spectacle. During my time at Ball State, I took classes that opened my eyes up to how dance is more than a just show. Dance, like any aspect of society, has racial, social, and societal flaws - whether the issues relate to how certain art forms are represented, who is credited for certain dance discoveries, or who is seen as the "ideal" dancer based on race/ethnic preference, the art form is not immune to these issues. While dance may face some of these issues and others, dance also has the power to challenge these societal issues through the artform. Through text, close readings, historical viewings and other stimulating assignments, I have come to understand dance in a new light: a light that takes dance and transforms it into something all of society should notice. Coming to Ball State, it was my goal to be a "Voice for the Arts". However, my voice has grown to encompass so many more aspects of what dance is and what dance can do. Throughout my time working with Professor Rebecca Pappas and all the dance faculty, I have been challenged and stretched to think about the issues in the dance world, as well as how dance can challenge and shed light on societal flaws. After a Dance & Media class I took the fall of my junior year, Professor Pappas approached me about this podcast series, and that is how my thesis came to be. All in all, these podcasts are a demonstration of my grasp and newfound knowledge of the power of dance.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Professor's Rebecca Pappas and Christie Zimmerman for their constant support and impact during my time at Ball State and specifically through this thesis. Thank you for helping me see dance in a new light and being such a positive resource to help me navigate my passions.

Also, I would like to thank Indiana Public Radio for allowing me to use the station's recording booths and editing software to create my podcasts.

Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Kendra Lowery, Professor Susan Koper, and Dr. Nyama McCarthy-Brown for allowing me to interview them about their contributions to the dance world. Without their willingness to share their knowledge and thoughts, this project would not have been possible.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Process Analysis Statement.....	1
First Episode Interview.....	2
Second Episode Interview.....	3
Editing.....	4
Some Final Thoughts.....	4
Appendix A.....	6
Appendix B.....	10
Appendix C.....	11
Works Cited.....	15
Links to Podcasts.....	16

## Process Analysis Statement

### Pre-Research

From the beginning of this project, my advisor and I knew we wanted to fill a niche. We did not want to create something that was already out there. Instead, we wanted to add to the content already out being produced and create something that would reach further than just the dance community. We wanted non-dancers to be interested in the work we would create. A big portion of research started with analyzing the podcasts that were already out there. I researched dance, history, and arts podcasts that were already out there and recorded elements from these categories that were interesting and possibly applicable to the work we would be creating (See Appendix A).

As someone who had never composed a podcast before, this research helped open the door to what was already out there, as well as provide resources and ideas of elements that could be incorporated into the podcasts we would create. This research helped me understand elements such as length, episode formatting, and types of questions that worked and didn't. It was apparent that a half hour was common for podcast creators, in order to maintain the listener's attention. Another commonality was the conversation format. Many podcasts didn't feel like a rigid interview. Instead, they created an environment for discussion. They also brought the listener in through vivid language and scene-setting music/elements. Something that was apparent, and also built on my journalism classes about audio, was the importance of "writing for the ear". In a podcast format, the viewer is unable to use their sight. Therefore, word choice, tone, topics, etc. all have to enable the listener to understand without using their eyes. My research (see *Appendix A*) demonstrated there wasn't a podcast currently out there tackling the topic of dance as more than spectacle and the societal role it can play. This pre-research continued to build upon a niche that needed filled.

## **First Episode Interview**

The first podcast that was created highlighted the work Dance Professor Susan Koper and Educational Leadership Professor Kendra Lowery were doing in preserving history. Both Koper and Lowery synthesized their respective expertise to tell the story of Sybil Jordan Hampton. Hampton was a student at Little Rock High School during de-segregation. Whereas everyone talks about the Little Rock Nine, Hampton was in school as well during these turbulent times and had just as powerful a story to tell. Both Koper and Hampton decided to bring her story to life through dance and use the medium to start a larger conversation about inclusion and the role we play in understanding and accepting people of all backgrounds and life experiences. After viewing the piece they had created, the next step was getting the interview set up. My role in this included finding the appropriate location to record the podcast, as well as coordinating each person's schedule to find a mutually agreeable time to record. Thankfully, everyone who was involved with the podcast was on campus, so organizing the interview wasn't very complicated. Through emails and in-person communication, this recording was set up. The interviews took place at the same time, and the recording was more of a discussion, rather than an interview. A conversation between myself, Pappas, Koper, and Lowery allowed for open communication and discussion to take place. My role during the interview was making sure all the sound was recording properly, as well as monitoring the timing of the interview. This proved to be one of the hardest elements of the interview because once the conversation got going, I didn't want to stop. Ideas kept flowing, and the conversation could've gone on forever. However, respecting everyone's times, as well as referring to the research that had already been done on good podcast lengths, helped to keep me focused on monitoring the length of the discussion. The questions developed were based off of the performance I had watched multiple times, in addition to drawing from ideas that had been expounded upon in my dance courses. Finding questions that would provoke deep thought and new insight about the topic we

were discussing was a challenge but also stimulating to create, modify, and eliminate questions as they came about. I had way more questions generated than we actually used, but thinking deeply about what I wanted to know more about helped the conversations contain rich and developed content (See Appendix B).

### **Second Episode Interview**

This episode proved much more difficult to coordinate and get recorded but was still an informative and valuable podcast to create. Unlike the first podcast, this discussion was based off an article by Dr. Nyama McCarthy-Brown who is an Assistant Professor of Community Engagement through Dance Pedagogy at Ohio State University. The article was titled “Dancing in the Margins” and dove into the idea of black ballerinas – the lack of their presence in ballet and why that is. The interview was myself, Dr. McCarthy-Brown, and Professor Pappas but was conducted over the phone for both interviews. Dr. Brown was in Ohio, and Professor Pappas was in New Jersey. I was still at Ball State and was in charge of facilitating the interview. Both parties called in to where I was recording, and we were able to conduct the podcast that way. This was the most difficult part of the podcast because we had to coordinate all parties with busy schedules and in different states. The research stage of this podcast began with reading and analyzing the article she wrote. After that was complete came question development again. This time, the questions were more based around what the article said and other ideas I had learned about in dance classes such as representation, where credit goes in dance, and who has the power. The interview touched on many of the questions that were already written, but we did not get through all of the questions, as the interview progressed. Some ideas took more time than anticipated, and not all the questions flowed with where the conversation was going. The interview lasted about one hour, was very stimulating and helped shed more of a light into this lack of representation in ballet and why that is/what’s being done to address it (See Appendix C).



## **Editing**

The editing was definitely the most challenging part of creating these podcasts. I had to take two one-hour long conversations and condense them to around 30-minute conversations. This proved to be so difficult because I felt all the material to be so valuable. It was difficult to say something was more important than something else. However, what helped me narrow down the podcasts was thinking about how these podcasts were going to relate to the general audience. That took me out of the picture and helped put the emphasis on what others would be drawn to. The part that was easy to edit out were times when we got off track or had a side conversation unrelated to the podcast. My editing process followed the sequence of listening to the whole recording, taking notes of why something should stay or go, manipulating the podcast based off of those notes, and repeating multiple times. Another element that proved challenging was moving around specific parts to earlier/later in the podcast. To help with flow and continuity, I did manipulate the order of some of the elements if I felt it made more sense somewhere else. For my first podcast, that one was edited five times. The second podcast was only edited two times and is still in the late stages of editing, in order to complete the thesis in the time allotted.

## **Some Final Thoughts**

As I look back on this work, I am so proud of what was accomplished and the questions that were discussed and looked into. I came into college wanting to continue to develop my passion for the Arts and Dance specifically. I have definitely done that, but I have come to understand dance in a much deeper way. I have done this by developing my voice to look at dance in a different way than simply as "something fun that brings myself and others joy." I have developed a voice that allows me articulate the processes that go into generating dance work, as well as the voice to talk about why dance is important past the physical elements. Dance is impacted by and impacts society every day. The problems the art form faces are society's problems, and the solutions it proposes can serve

as society's solutions. For example, the work Koper and Lowery are doing is taking dance to shed light on a lack of inclusivity and how people can come together to better understand each other. Their creation was about so much more than telling a story through movement. Instead, they are using dance as a springboard to generate conversation about what inclusivity means and how society can continue to strive to better understand and accept those we may not be similar to. Whereas the Arts can bring joy and excitement to society, they also have the power to cause societal change and leave a long-lasting impact. For example, McCarthy-Brown's work looks at how dance traditions and "old" mindsets have kept certain people out of the world of ballet. Based on skin color and cultural traditions, this impact is still felt today. However, by shedding light on the issue and highlighting why it is a problem and what can be done to address it, long-lasting issues can be addressed and hopefully mended. Dance artists and practitioners spend their careers diving into dance, and it was such a blessing to pick their minds and get an inside look into their powerful work. Through this thesis, I feel I have achieved my goal of being a "voice for the arts" through strengthening my personal understanding of the artform, creating these podcast episodes, generating text and video stories on different dance happenings on Ball State, and devoting time to helped me to grow even more as a dance practitioner, performer, scholar, lover, and advocate. Through these opportunities, I will leave Ball State with a new and richer understanding of what dance is and what it can achieve.

## APPENDIX A

### Podcast Pre-Recording Notes...

- o Serious Moonlight - hosted by Ava Yasantawaa, part of Downtown Dance community in NYC, Sponsored by Gidney Dance Center, about the dance community in NYC and questions they face about identity, money, and issues; aimed at someone in the field
- o Thump - about dance music, clubbing, produced by Vice, video series?
- o We Speak Dance - video podcast, showing dance in a way we want, relatable to more people, maybe similar to Anthony Bourdain
- o Ballet Uncovered - uncovering the world of ballet in dance
- o Patasha - talking about dance, about the professional dance world

### STUFF YOU MISSED IN HISTORY CLASS (Ep. Who was Emanuel Swedenborg?)

- Hosted by two people
- Highlighting the “greatest and strangest” in History
- Has music in the background for beginning
- Referenced old episode that tied into current one
- Has an intro “theme song”
- o Like a TV show
- Go back and forth between hosts, like a conversation
- Very specific topics... not broad, very focused - keeps a history lesson manageable
- Not always interviewing someone, just the hosts give information
- Interviewed expert in last 8 minutes of podcast

- o Had her introduce herself and give credibility

#### HOW ABOUT A TIME MACHINE: A DEEP BITE INTO HISTORY (Ep. Judith Garay)

- Hosted by two people
- Came about because of “their unified interest and lack of knowledge on the evolution of the contemporary dance and performing arts in Canada”
- Interview artists who have and continue to push dance
- Very “unrehearsed”
- o Laughing, cracking jokes, having casual conversation not about topic
- Introduce interviewee immediately
- Has her give her credentials
- Talks about her life, not necessarily about topic of study in beginning
- Very casual/conversational
- o Will “butt in”
- Not history based, very interviewee focused - their life and accomplishments
- Not very “non-dance” focused
- o You have to care about the Arts to listen
- Plays “game” at end... a tradition
- o Like 20 questions
- o Signifies the podcast is ending
- o Gives a different side to interviewee

### SERIOUS MOONLIGHT (Ep. Cassie Mey)

- Features “original events, discussions, and interviews from the dance community focusing on pressing issues in the dance field”
- Starts with the podcast’s internal thoughts - why she thinks the topic is important and what prompted her to explore this topic
- Introduces herself
- Introduces guest first
- o Tells of their relationship
- Introduces her background to give credibility
- About the interviewee... not about a history or something the interviewee is an expert in
- Much more professional... Eve stays quiet and lets her talk
- o Very similar to journalistic interviews - let the interviewee talk, silence is good

### THE LONELY PALETTE (Ep. 15 - El Anatatsui’s “Black River”)

- “Returns art history to the masses”
- Episode consists of picking a painting, interviewing unsuspecting museum visitors, gives deep history into the object (the movement, social context, and what makes it interesting to non-art people)
- Starts with non-expert observations (the museum visitor interviews)
- Has fun intro with music in background
- Very blunt about people not thinking studying “art history” is important
- o Gives reasons why it actually is
- o Conversational and makes the listener think

- Gives history on artist being discussed
- Puts art piece into perspective of society
  - o Talks about economics, why the piece is more than just something to look at
- Like a close reading
  - o Talks about political and social happenings of the time
  - o Tied work into politics and feminism

#### A PIECE OF WORK

- Strong and wanting to make art more accessible to masses
- Talks to first-hand sources (artists)
- Allows listener to decide what
- Did description of work

## APPENDIX B

### Pre-Determined Questions...

- Have Susan go through and vocally describe what is happening in the piece; her own words and sights

- QUESTIONS

- o Why did you think this was an important story to tell?
- o Why did you decide to tell it through dance?
- o How did the process change/emerge once you began the piece?
- o This piece is about an African American, Sybil Hampton. Do you think it always needs to be danced by an African American?

Is it about the audience needing to see a black body?

- o What is the division of Sybil versus the core group of dancers?

What does that show? Power struggle?

- o Why did you enhance Sybil's narrative with dance?

Is the dance illustrating Sybil's story or giving a different perspective?

- o What were your different strategies with this piece? How did they influence the work?

- o What do you see as the piece's relevance today?

- o What is the role of a white choreographer representing African American history?

- o Were there any other seminal African American works that influenced or made you want to do this piece? What role did they play?

## APPENDIX C

Pre-Determined Questions...

Dr. Nyama Questions... pronounced NYA

REBECCA... Introduce us to you, your research, and how you became involved in the topic of black ballerinas

Go back and forth with questions... piggy back off each other when possible!

Some might not view race and ballet as related. How are they related? How has this relationship developed?

What is DTH and how did it change the game for AA ballet dancers?

Can you discuss the black arts movement in more depth and talk about how it related to the development of DTH?

You discuss and, to some extent critique DTH Creole Giselle. Can you talk about what this was and why you might be critical of it?

You discuss how AA ballerinas face a different kind of sexualization than their white counter parts. Can you discuss this?



How is it possible to challenge these pre-developed stereotypes (Jezebel, Mammy and Sapphire) and discuss what they are? What will have to change in the dance world to “get over” these pre-decided views?

You talk about ballerinas having a very fragile essence about them. Has today’s culture challenged this in any way? Why do you ballet has not “moved forward”? Why is the female lead so fragile still?

You discuss of colorism and color casting is fascinating and might be new to white audiences listening. Can you explain this in more depth?

Why does race/skin color need to be thought about in casting? Was that even written when scores/Choreo was developed? Is there anyone doing this well?

You mention Alice Walker and her ideas of Womanism in contrast to feminism. Can you explain what you see as the difference between these? Why is that important?

Why do you think views from critics keeping black ballerinas out of ballet have persisted?

How does she see Misty Copeland, as an individual, challenging this stereotype? What does her presence mean for race/equality in the field? Is she possibly the most well-known ballerina in the

last 15 years? But, does that mean things are really changing, or is her SINGLE presence doing all the work but not necessarily meaning more black ballerinas can/will be accepted into ballet?

Did creating solely AA companies provide a “scapegoat” for white companies not to hire black ballerinas? They already had somewhere to go...

How have female and male AA ballet dancers been differently received by the field? Why do you think this is?

You talk about a double standard in identity w/AA Ballerinas. If they choose one, they lose the other. How would being able to accept both identities (AA AND EUROPEAN) have made ballet more unique?

Can you talk about your experience conducting these interviews? Did you find subjects eager or reluctant to discuss these issues? How do you account for that?

How does this issue go much further than just affecting ballet... what does this continue to say about society and the growth that still needs to be made?

Where is this research going for you now? What do you see as its continued relevance?

If a listener had one take away what would you want that to be?

What are you most excited about in the dance world?

## **Works Cited**

Henderson, Garnet. "Memo To Non-Dancers: No, Being A Professional Dancer Is Not Just 'Fun' and 'Easy.'" Dance Magazine, Rebelmouse, 12 July 2017, [www.dancemagazine.com/oh-youre-a-dancer-thats-fun-2457383097.html](http://www.dancemagazine.com/oh-youre-a-dancer-thats-fun-2457383097.html).

### **Links to Podcasts**

Nyama McCarthy-Brown Podcast Link...

<https://ballstate.box.com/s/1mek636gml1e033y4rcu4gt3bnn1dxa1>

Susan Koper and Kendra Lowery Podcast Link...

<https://ballstate.box.com/s/9x833b4mje513ga8zlx4cs6zk3lrm6t>